

Star Wars and the Hero's Journey

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ABSTRACT

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The *Star Wars* saga created by George Lucas was, by his own admission, influenced and guided by Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory. The monomyth theory was outlined in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, written by Campbell. In the book, Campbell outlines the Hero's Journey, a narrative cycle he developed from his research into mythologies and fairy tales from around the world.

The Hero's Journey consists of three distinct phases. The Departure, in which the Hero must embark on their adventure, discover the larger world, and confront new enemies. The Initiation, in which the Hero must undergo trials to prove their worth. Finally, there is The Return, in which the Hero returns to the world of the non-heroic in order to solve the crisis that instigated the journey.

This paper examines how George Lucas uses the Hero's Journey throughout the original *Star Wars* trilogy, consisting of *A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *The Return of the Jedi*, and how George Lucas reinvents film and TV tropes.

George Lucas' stated purpose is to create a new mythology to address contemporary moral, spiritual, and cultural quandaries. Understanding his work and its legacy fosters deeper insight into current cultural mores.

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Introduction

The Hero's Journey is a narrative framework developed by Joseph Campbell. Joseph Campbell believed that there are unifying elements in stories from all cultures. Campbell wrote *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* using literary and psychological analysis to distill these stories into the common tropes that appear in myths, legends, and folktales from around the world. His theory influenced George Lucas, the creator of *Star Wars*, and George Lucas used the monomyth structure for the foundation of the original trilogy of the *Star Wars* saga.



The Hero's Journey Fig 1¹

¹ *The Hero's Journey in diagram*

Joseph Campbell envisioned the path of the hero as a cycle, separated into three distinct phases, the Departure, the Initiation, and the Return. Each phase has further subdivisions that detail the hero's journey and the obstacles they must overcome, the allies they win, and the completion of the journey. The purpose of the Hero's Journey, according to Campbell, is to acquire a special knowledge held by a sacred figure. This knowledge must be won through trials before the hero returns from their journey to share the knowledge with the world. George Lucas sticks to the grander structure of the Hero's Journey, with the three sections appearing in each film, and with each film of the original trilogy being a step in and of itself.

Any alterations George Lucas makes to Campbell's formula are done to create expectations via film and television tropes, and then to subvert those tropes. George Lucas has been open about his use of Joseph Campbell's work and his desire to regenerate ancient stories, as stated in his interview with Bill Moyers "*I consciously set about to re-create myths and the — classic mythological motifs. And I wanted to use those motifs to deal with issues that existed today.*"² To properly understand his intended message the audience must understand, the journey his characters undertake and the story elements they use and subvert.

The journey of George Lucas' epic begins with the establishment of two separate worlds; the Special and the Mundane. The Special world is the world of danger and violence, inhabited by Princess Leia and Darth Vader. The opening scene of *Star Wars* has the *Tantive IV*, a rebel ship, being chased by the menacing Imperial ship

² Interview with Bill Moyers

Devastator. Shortly after *The Devastator* catches the *Tantive IV*, Darth Vader and his ruthless methods are introduced, giving the audience insight into the world our hero will soon be thrust into. In contrast to Darth Vader's introduction, the first moments in which Luke appears on screen, has him buying faulty droids with his uncle, complaining about his chores, and longingly looking out to the setting suns of Tatooine. His moment of daydreaming is underscored with a swelling music cue signaling the triumphant beginning of our story, only to be interrupted by his family calling him in from his daydreaming and to his place in the Mundane World.

The two worlds change through each film. In each film, Luke is forced to confront his desire to remain within the status quo or to adventure beyond it and gain deeper knowledge. Knowledge that can be used to aid his allies and the galaxy at large in the fight against the Empire and the Sith.

In *A New Hope* Luke is introduced as a farm boy going nowhere, his few attempts to break free from the monotony of his life are shut down by his family. Luke's Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru, the audience discovers, are actively attempting to keep him from the Special world out of filial love and to protect Luke from the hidden dangers of his secret heritage, which is connected to the world outside their simple life. The Special world in *A New Hope* is the world of the Rebellion and the Empire, it is exemplified in Princess Leia, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and Darth Vader. Leia and Obi-Wan represent two different kinds of knowledge and Darth Vader represents the danger of the new world. Darth Vader is also the final obstacle to Luke gaining the sacred knowledge. The knowledge Leia represents is Luke's decision to join the Rebel Alliance and fight the Empire. Obi-

Wan's knowledge is that of Luke's parentage, his place in the Special world as the son of a hero, a Jedi Knight, and his right to take up the mantle of a Jedi Knight.

In *A New Hope* Luke gains the knowledge of purpose by joining the Rebellion. He also merges his two worlds, his experience blasting womp-rats on Tatooine being invaluable in destroying the Death Star. His newly gained camaraderie with Han Solo and Chewbacca is enough to convince his allies to return in a critical moment. The final scene of the film shows Luke as a hero, being recognized by the Rebellion for his role in rescuing Leia, and successfully destroying the Empire's Death Star

In *The Empire Strikes Back* Luke must once again journey from the Mundane world of his role as a Rebel Commander to seek new knowledge; he must connect to his legacy, that of a Jedi Knight. In *A New Hope* we are introduced to the idea of a Jedi Knight and the Force as a magic system. We are told by Obi-Wan that Luke's father is a Jedi Knight who was struck down by Darth Vader, a former student of Obi-Wan's and a Jedi Knight turned Sith. During the three years between *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke becomes comfortable in his role as commander of the Rebellion, but a visit from the ghost of Obi-Wan forces him to leave his friends and journey to Dagobah to seek out Yoda and the deeper mysteries of the Force. In *The Empire Strikes Back* we get a larger glimpse of what powers a Jedi or Sith trained in the Force has access to. The capabilities of what trained Force-users can do is important because it sets a new threshold for the difficulties Luke must face. Yoda's lecture about size and power are important because it shows that the Force is capable of great subtlety. The vision Luke has of his friends held captive by Darth Vader also shows that the Sith have access to Luke via the Force. Luke's decision to aid his friends, despite Yoda and Obi-

Wan's warning, reveals to both Luke and the audience Luke's motivations. He is impatient and unwilling to be subtle. Luke learns the difficult lesson of allowing your enemy to have control of the field, the dangers of arrogance, the truth of his heritage, and how thin the line between the Light and Dark side of the Force is. The skills Luke learns are important to the eventual reveal of his heritage in the iconic "*No, I am your father*"³ moment, but Luke is not the only character who gains knowledge. Han Solo and Leia both realize their love for each other, Han learns that he has a true purpose in working with the Rebellion, and Leia learns to trusts Han, as a partner should. Each of these truths that the characters learn will affect their decisions in the final installment of the trilogy.

Return of the Jedi is the culmination of those personal heroic journeys. Leia accepts her feelings for Han, plans his rescue, and even executes it herself. Leia uses her experiences as a General of the Rebellion and a field operative to place herself, Chewbacca, and Lando Calrissian in positions to escape Jabba, holding Luke back as a contingency should her first plan fail. Han Solo is now dedicated to the Rebellion in a manner he wasn't before. He is prepared to lead a team on an important and deadly mission and willing to step aside and allow Luke and Leia to be together despite his love for her. Luke manages to learn from every mistake he made in confronting Darth Vader and does not repeat them while confronting Jabba the Hutt. Luke also returns to Dagobah to consult with Yoda and Obi-Wan one last time before his final confrontation with Darth Vader. Luke's confrontation with Darth Vader and the Emperor is important because it puts all of Luke's knowledge and skills to the test. Luke also offers himself as

³ *The Empire Strikes Back*

a distraction, placing himself in the hands of the Emperor and on the targeted Death Star in order to protect his friends and hide the coming attack. The Emperor wields Luke's fears against him, goading Luke to turn him to the Dark side of the Force. All the knowledge Luke has gained is put to the test, his own confidence in his skills and perception is tested against his impulsiveness and desire to strike down evil. Despite his own brief fall to the Dark Side when fighting Darth Vader, Luke ultimately rejects the Emperor, tossing aside his lightsaber and declaring "*I am a Jedi. Like my father before me.*"⁴ This is the most important moment of the film. Luke's rejection of the Dark Side coupled with his reaffirmation of his familial bonds with Darth Vader are enough to convince Darth Vader to sacrifice himself to save his son. In the final exchange between Darth Vader and Luke, Darth Vader assures his son that he has been saved already and begs Luke to remove his mask and allow him to "*look on you with my own eyes*"⁵. Darth Vader's final words are to remind Luke that the faith he placed in his father was rewarded, validating Luke's desire to redeem his father despite the worries and warnings of both Yoda and Obi-Wan. The *Return of the Jedi* is named such not only for the return of the Jedi Order to the galaxy at large in the form of Luke, but also of the redemption of Darth Vader who casts aside his title of Sith to become Anakin Skywalker, The Hero Without Fear, once more.

The Hero's Journey

Establishing two worlds sets up the first part of the Hero's Journey, known as the Departure, in this part of the journey the hero must come face to face with his world and

⁴ *Return of the Jedi*

⁵ *Return of the Jedi*

challenge the status quo. The first step of the journey is the *Call to Adventure*. Luke receives the call to adventure from the short hologram message of Princess Leia. Luke's immediate fascination with her, his desire to help her is his call to leave the Mundane world and enter the Special. Luke's nascent desire to experience the world beyond his uncle's moisture farm is quickly shut down, the reality of his aunt and uncle's livelihood requiring him to stay. Aunt Beru and Uncle Owen have a short exchange "*He's got too much of his father in him. That's what I'm afraid of*"⁶ indicating that Luke has a heritage that marks him out as "the hero". Luke has a legacy that is connected to the world beyond the Mundane and his inner nature will compel him to seek out adventure. We get confirmation of Luke's special heritage when he meets Obi-Wan Kenobi, the mentor, who proceeds to provide Luke an avenue out of the Mundane and a claim to a role in the special world through his mysterious father, a former Jedi Knight. Luke's immediate reaction to Obi-Wan's offer is to *Reject the Call*, another step of the Hero's Journey, something he does three different times in the same scene, using his uncle's arguments as his own. The death of Luke's family forces him to accept Obi-Wan's and reject the Mundane world, saying "*there's nothing for me here now.*"⁷

Obi-Wan represents the next step in the Hero's Journey. Obi-Wan provides both *Supernatural Aid* and the means to *Cross the Threshold*. Obi-Wan serves as a mentor and guide, reveals the mystery of Luke's parentage and the capabilities of the Force, his knowledge of the dangers of the world, assists him to find the local smuggler haunt, communicate with Chewbacca, and protect Luke. The supernatural abilities of those

⁶ *A New Hope*

⁷ *A New Hope*

who can use the Force, seen only briefly via Darth Vader and Obi-Wan, are incredibly important. As Obi-Wan stated “*The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It’s an energy field created by all living things...it binds the galaxy together.*”⁸ Obi-Wan’s work as the *Supernatural Aid* continues throughout the films as he guides Luke on each major path he takes in the trilogy. In *A New Hope* Obi-Wan takes Luke to Alderaan, he directs Luke to Dagobah in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and he counsels Luke on what to do with Darth Vader before he leaves to Endor in *Return of the Jedi*. Obi-Wan’s aid comes in the form of advice or knowledge. He provides the support that Luke needs to make his own choices, to ensure his own growth. His encouragement and belief in Luke are what allow him to access the Force for the first time. His words help Luke destroy the Death Star and mold Luke into the Jedi he becomes. Obi-Wan’s aid is important because it doesn’t coddle Luke, he protects him at the beginning of *A New Hope* but by the end of the film, he is dead, no longer capable of saving Luke, only of providing advice and counsel.

Obi-Wan, along with Han Solo, leads Luke to *Cross the Threshold*, stepping from the Mundane world and into the Special. This change is shown Luke physically leaving Tatooine and commencing his training as a Jedi Knight. Luke’s introduction into the Jedi Order is the first step to finding his place in the Special world. He has begun to obtain secret knowledge, its rarity backed up by both Chief Motti, who was choked by Darth Vader and by Han Solo, both characters expressing doubt and disbelief in the idea of the Force. Motti insulting Darth Vader for his “*sorcerer’s ways*” and Han calling it a “*hokey religion*”. Luke’s access to this knowledge places him in the same arena as

⁸ *A New Hope*

Darth Vader and Obi-Wan -- a person of power -- someone who can invoke fear and bend the minds of others to their will. Luke will cross the threshold several times in the original trilogy, and each time he does he gains new knowledge and new capabilities. Joseph Campbell refers to the *Threshold* as a guardian, the first thing that separates the hero from the Special world. The threshold is the edge of the forest where the wild things prowl. The dangers of the new world are personified in fairy tales by monsters and mad things. Lucas' thresholds are more internal. They are Luke's struggle with his situation, finding his place in this new world he is unprepared for, and dealing with the new dangers that hunt him. Luke must contend with and confront, in both *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, that he is outclassed and unable to face his new foes. He must train and obtain the secret knowledge available to him or be devoured.

Being devoured is exactly what happens as Luke encounters the next hero's trial. *The Belly of the Beast* is used to strip the heroes of their advantages and place them in vulnerable positions. What is most interesting about this step is that in the three films, *A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *The Return of the Jedi*, the *Belly* is a trial for each of the members of the major trio. Luke first, then Han and finally Leia. Luke must convince Han to help him rescue Leia, Han needs to make a deal with Lando Calrissian, a character of dubious loyalty, and Leia must attend the execution of her beloved while enslaved. Of interest is that Luke and Han must be rescued from their dive into the *Belly*, Luke's failed rescue of Leia is saved when the captive princess herself takes charge and creates a new means of escape. Han's decision to turn to Lando results in his capture but also Lando's joining of the Rebellion. Leia's own trial in the *Belly* is ended when she takes advantage of the situation to slay Jabba the Hutt and break her

own chains. The *Belly* strips the hero of their allies. They must face their trial separately and emerge changed. Luke's experience in the Death Star solidifies his decisions, removes his mentor, and forces him to confront the special world on his own. Han owns up to his love for Leia and desire to protect her. She emerges a warrior for the audience but much of her central character is unchanged. George Lucas uses the Death Star to remove Obi-Wan from the immediacy of the story. Obi-Wan can no longer rescue Luke and Luke must make his decisions without the input of Obi-Wan.

Joseph Campbell describes the *Belly of the Beast* as the rebirth of the Hero, something that must consume the hero before they can escape it and be remade. Each member of the main Star Wars trio will experience transformation and growth throughout the trilogy. Luke's experiences in the Death Star allow him to finally take agency after having been swept along in his own story. The runaway R2-D2, the death of his family, and the capture of the *Millennium Falcon* have all been outside his control. The first time Luke takes charge of a situation in *A New Hope* is when he convinces Han to help him rescue Leia. When our heroes arrive on Yavin 4, Leia reveals that the Empire only would have let them escape the Death Star if they were tracking the *Millennium Falcon*. While in the Death Star, which serves as the *Belly of the Beast*, Luke passes through several other steps of the Hero's Journey. These steps are important to the completion of the first film but have a more powerful presence later in the saga. The Death Star is not only the *Belly of the Beast*, but it also contains the *Road of Trials* and the *Goddess* steps of the Hero's Journey. The *Trials*, much like the other steps of the Hero's Journey, appear several times throughout the original trilogy. It is the rescue attempt made on Leia, the Jedi training under Yoda, the vision of Luke as Vader, and the rescue of Han Solo. The

Trials are tasks that challenge the hero in the new world he has joined. Lucas uses them to grow Luke's character. Luke is confronted with his fear and worry about escaping the Death Star, his impatience to take up the mantle of Jedi Knight, to protect his friends against the counsel of his mentors, and the desire to redeem his father. The *Road of Trials* is designed to find Luke's character weaknesses, his hesitance, his impatience, and his fear and force him to confront them.

Luke meets Leia as the *Goddess*, a figure that is often played as the damsel. The *Goddess* represents femininity and comfort. She represents a refuge and ally that loves the hero. Leia is the reward for action. Leia, throughout the film, has possessed a defiant spirit. She insults Tarkin and Vader, witnesses the destruction of her home world, and endures torture at the hands of the Empire. She is no wilting flower to be protected and cared for. Her first words to Luke are an insult designed to throw off the stormtrooper to create a means of escape. While pinned down, it is Leia who creates an escape path for the party, Leia who comforts Luke after Obi-Wan's death, Leia who realizes the truth of their escape and Leia who confronts Han, challenging his world view and leading the way for his eleventh-hour return.

The next several steps involve Luke's acclimation to the Special world, the reaffirmation of his new identity, rejection of the return to his old state, rescue from outside, and the reconciliation and freedom of both worlds. Joseph Campbell created the Hero's Journey to collect the world's stories and distill them into their most common elements. His work looked at the major themes and systems that existed in mythologies around the world and from there he codified a framework that could be used to craft a generic but familiar story. George Lucas followed that framework to craft each Star Wars film in the original

trilogy. The common nature of the film, the metaphors, and characters it uses are known to the audience. By using a framework recognizable to audiences, Lucas could then rely on the felt familiarity to twist his characters into new stories, upending the well-known and building new meaning.

The most important pieces of Lucas' take on the Hero's Journey happen in the second and third installments of the original trilogy. After using the first film to establish his characters and their archetypes, Luke as the Heroic Knight, Han the Loveable Scoundrel, and Leia as Warrior-Princess, Lucas will go on to twist those characteristics and generate his own fairytale.

In the opening moments of *Empire Strikes Back* the relationship between Han and Leia, which seemed friendly in the final moments of *A New Hope*, returns to being antagonistic. Han claims that Leia won't admit to her feelings for him. That, coupled with the worries he has about the price on his head, leaves him regretting his decision to join the Rebellion. Leia rejects her title as a princess, something Han uses to annoy her. Leia kisses Luke in order to frustrate Han. George Lucas uses the structure of Joseph Campbell's monomyth to tell a story with a recognizable rhythm before turning the tropes upside down and telling a different story.

The final message of *Star Wars* isn't that Good always defeats Evil or that democracy is better than a dictatorship. *Star Wars* explores those themes and many more, but the central theme is the importance of balance. Luke's greatest challenges are recognizing his place in his own story. He is swept up in the larger story of the galaxy and the revelations of his special heritage, first revealed by Obi-Wan and then Darth Vader,

which cause him to doubt his place in the world. Luke grapples with sudden revelations and maintaining his internal balance, throughout the original trilogy. The loss of Obi-Wan makes him realize the true danger of the wider Galaxy, Darth Vader's revelation of his paternity forces Luke to confront his own inner darkness, the death of Yoda leaves him without a mentor again, and his need to redeem Vader makes him realize that he has endangered his friends.

Triumph vs. Balance

*"There are two kinds of people in the world, compassionate people and selfish people...compassionate people exist in the Light side of the Force and selfish people live in the Dark Side"*⁹ This division between the Dark and Light sides of the Force is well highlighted in the Star Wars films. Obi-Wan's speech defining the Force in the opening of *A New Hope* illustrates the Jedi's take on the mystical unifier as an existence beyond the individual, a connection shared by all living things. Darth Vader, on the other hand, defines the Force in terms of its power, telling Overseer Motti, *"Don't be too proud of this technological terror you've constructed. The power to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force."*¹⁰ Vader's belief in the power of the Force is even more important as this exchange is briefly preceded by a discussion with the Imperial officers regarding the new state of the Galactic Empire, Grand Moff Tarkin assuring the other officers that the Imperial Senate is no longer necessary because,

⁹ George Lucas at Goalcast <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RElw0dhBsOI>

¹⁰ *A New Hope*

with the Death Star, the Empire can wield fear as a weapon on a scale never before seen.

The difference between the Jedi and Sith philosophies regarding the Force is important to Luke's story. The Jedi and the Sith represent the fate of the hero. If he follows the path of the Jedi, he needs to embrace the selflessness of the Order or fall prey to the self-indulgence of the Sith. The struggle between Dark and Light inside Luke is best shown in his second journey into the *Belly of the Beast* and along the *Road of Trials*. Luke's training with Yoda allows him to connect more deeply with the Force, allowing him to utilize its powers in a more directed manner than he has previously. His experience using the Force to guide his torpedo in the assault on the Death Star and his desperate use of telekinesis in the Wampa's cave, gives him glimpses of the danger that Han and Leia face and warns him of his own future in which he fights and kills himself dressed as Darth Vader. Luke's desperation to help his friends leads him to abandon his Jedi training. His decision to face Darth Vader before his training is complete leaves him unprepared to face a master combatant who has spent years immersed in the Force. Luke eventually pays the price for his rash decisions when his faith is shaken to the core by Darth Vader revealing himself as Luke's father and crippling him. However, Luke's decision to rush to his friends is what keeps him firmly entrenched in the Light side of the Force. His abandonment of the Jedi training is done solely to help his friends, his selfless desires to protect those he is closest to is what makes him truly good. Darth Vader's overtures to have Luke join him in the Dark Side are rooted in language that should tempt a person like Luke. Darth Vader claims that

with Luke on his side, they can cast aside the Emperor and bring peace and prosperity to the galaxy.

In the Star Wars universe, the Dark and Light sides of the Force are direct opposites. The Jedi speak of the Force as a unifying, transcendent energy. A philosophy that is also a reality as Obi-Wan senses the destruction of Alderaan even while traveling through Hyperspace, *“I felt a great disturbance in the Force. As if millions of voices suddenly cried out in terror and were suddenly silenced.”*¹¹ This reality of the Force is confirmed later in the scene when Obi-Wan explains to Luke that the Force partially controls your actions but also responds to commands. Luke then demonstrates his abilities by successfully blocking the stinging bolts of the training remote.

When discussing the nature of the Force with Yoda, Luke gets a better explanation of how the Dark Side operates. *“A Jedi’s strength flows from the Force. But beware the Dark Side. Anger, fear aggression. The Dark Side of the Force are they, easily they flow, quick to join you in a fight. If once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny.”*¹² This warning from Yoda coupled with the Emperor’s taunt of *“by now you must know that your father can never be turned from the Dark Side”*¹³ and Darth Vader’s own fatalistic proclamation of *“it is too late for me, son”*¹⁴ suggest that the Dark Side and Light side of the Force are truly at odds and that the Dark Side of the Force is stronger, because testing it even once is enough to damn one of the most powerful and renowned Jedi of his time to servitude.

¹¹ *A New Hope*

¹² *The Empire Strikes Back*

¹³ *Return of the Jedi*

¹⁴ *Return of the Jedi*

However, Luke's personal journey contradicts these statements of certainty. Luke experiences fear, anger, and hatred and he uses them in his fights. It can be seen clearly on his face. The desperation with which Luke strikes out at his enemies is in clear contrast to the fight we see between Darth Vader and Obi-Wan, which is slower, more considered and almost ritualistic, with none of the flailing, shouting or anger that is apparent whenever Luke wields his lightsaber in combat. Luke's eventual sympathy for his father leads him to attempt to redeem him. Both Yoda and Obi-Wan encourage Luke not to face Darth Vader, fearing that the strength of Darth Vader and Luke's emotional investment in his father will cause him to fall to the Dark Side, something the Emperor is counting on. Luke disagrees with the more experienced and knowledgeable Force-users and his determination is rewarded. Luke can reach his father while being tortured by the Emperor.

The Dark side, up until the final moments of *Return of the Jedi*, has been an inescapable evil. The wisest and most powerful characters, who have fought the Dark Side their entire lives or been a part of it, are certain of its stranglehold. Luke's defiance of their wisdom is a rejection of a status quo that is over eight hundred years old, as the Jedi Order is at least as old as Yoda.

Leia as Princess and her rejection of the role

The princess as a figure to be rescued is a common theme in storytelling. Many modern American films, specifically animated Disney films, have Princess fairytales at the center, adapted from folklore all around the world. While many princess stories have

women as objects of desire or serving the role of the *Goddess* as described by Campbell, Princess Leia of *Star Wars* doesn't fall into this category. Princess Leia, from the first moments we see her on screen, is an active combatant, defiant and a dignified member of the government, using her role as a senator to threaten Darth Vader who operates as the Emperor's right hand. Princess Leia's role as the *Goddess* figure or alternately as the temptress should cast her as an obstacle to be overcome or a showpiece to distribute rewards. However, Leia not only doesn't play the role of damsel in distress, she actively rejects being typecast as such by vehemently demanding at the beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back*, that Han Solo stop referring to her as "Your Worship". Leia's role in the Rebellion is one of leadership and her proper title is 'General'. She is a commander of troops, a strategist, and operative as evidenced by her role in *A New Hope*.

Leia's rejection of her role as princess, and the *Goddess* is important because it moves her from a part of Luke's journey to a character all her own. While it is difficult to plot out Leia's *Heroic Journey* due to the fact, we meet her *in media res*, she struggles with many of the same issues Luke does. Leia's defiance of Darth Vader, her immediate willingness to take charge of her own rescue, and her revelation to the relieved Luke and Han about the truth of their escape showcase a woman who is strong, intelligent and most importantly a character with agency. Leia isn't a trophy character who is swept along by other characters. She is determined to lead and fight for her beliefs.

George Lucas subverts the expectations of Leia's role as a princess, as perceived by popular literature in America and as the *Goddess* according to Joseph Campbell's monomyth structure. Joseph Campbell defines the *Goddess* as the thing that completes

the hero, they are necessary for each other. The hero on his journey is seeking knowledge that can only be found in the special world, and the Goddess represents that knowledge. Joseph Campbell writes *“Women, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know. As he progresses in the slow initiation, which is life, the form of the goddess for him undergoes a series of changes: she can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending. She lures, she guides, she bids him to burst his fetters.”*¹⁵ Leia acts as Goddess for both Luke and Han and in different manners. Leia represents what Luke desires to find in himself, the determined warrior whose life is spent in the service and protection of others. For Han, she is the catalyst for change from the jaded mercenary to the lover. Leia’s character drives both of those changes. Luke’s original adoration of the “beautiful” holographic woman changes into the care he feels for a sibling. Han sees Leia as a paycheck, a means for him to clear his debts to Jabba the Hutt and return to a life of criminal endeavors. Over the course of the trilogy, we see Han change from an opportunistic gangster to a responsible military figure in the Rebellion. Leia herself is not a passive figure, she is the guiding force behind the search for and eventual rescue of Han Solo in the opening of *Return of the Jedi*. The rescue of Han Solo is an interesting look at how Lucas flips the trope of the damsel in distress. In this instance Han, the rogue archetype has been captured and it is up to Leia to rescue him. She devises the plan, sneaks into Jabba’s palace, and asserts herself as a bounty hunter and a figure of respect. While her initial plan is a failure, she has a backup plan that has Luke causing enough damage and

¹⁵ *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

chaos that Leia can strangle Jabba the Hutt and free herself. Leia is certainly not helpless and can rescue herself.

The reason Lucas' subversion of audience expectations for Leia is important harkens back to his desire to create a modern fairytale. While Disney, the major producer of American fairy tales, is known for portraying strong female leads since the 1990's Disney renaissance, their earlier work had a more classic prince-princess system in which princesses were often rescued by princes and rarely were required to pick up a weapon and rescue themselves.

Lucas' decision to make Leia self-sufficient indicates that he was ahead of the movement that popularized the more action-oriented princess figures that appeared in mainstream Disney movies starting in the early 1990s. Star Wars was a record-breaking blockbuster film and the franchise that followed shaped the culture that followed it. Lucas' helped popularize and make it financially feasible for major motion pictures to cast women in roles of action and power. By having Leia buck the role of princess or *Goddess* and have her character experience growth as a hero alongside Luke and Han, Lucas' forged a new stereotype in fairy tales -- women as heroes as or more capable than their male counterparts.

Darth Vader as Hero, Father, and Villain

Darth Vader exists as the major antagonist in two of the three original trilogy films. His height, voice, and sartorial presentation amplify his menacing presence and actions as clearly evil. Throughout *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back* Darth Vader's

morals remain clear. It isn't until the end of *The Empire Strikes Back* and his revelation of being Luke's father that a new and strikingly different set of expectations for his character are established. The revelations of Luke's true parentage, the fact that Leia is Luke's sister and the truth of the fate of his father all change the way that Darth Vader's actions should be viewed.

Joseph Campbell's theories on the Hero's relationship with the father are based on the psychoanalytic theories of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud. These theories frame the father as a figure of disruption and destruction. In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell paints the father as an unwelcome figure, whose presence disrupts the world around him. In this nebulous manner, Luke's father is much the same. Prior to the revelation of Darth Vader's identity, Luke's father is referenced obliquely by other characters, most importantly Obi-Wan.

Lucas introduces us to Luke's father in the short exchange between Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru, in which they indicate that Luke's destiny will inevitably take him beyond their world. Uncle Owen expresses fear that this destiny will only bring ruin to Luke, forcing him to face dangers and truths that he is unprepared for. In this instance, the father is the disruptive figure who intrudes into the bliss of peace. Luke is safe with his aunt and uncle and the larger world has no interest in him. But the legacy of his father, the legacy of the Skywalker bloodline, is driving Luke from his haven.

The next reference we have to Luke's father is when Luke meets Obi-Wan who alludes to the true nature of Anakin Skywalker, a man he describes as being "*the best star pilot*

in the galaxy...a cunning warrior...and he was a good friend."¹⁶ All of these are qualities we discover in Luke by the end of the first film. Luke convinces Han Solo to attempt a rescue of Princess Leia, he decides to stay with the Rebel Alliance and fight the Empire. Finally, his piloting skills are on display in his successful navigation of the Death Star trench when he destroys it above Yavin 4. George Lucas grows Luke along the same path as Anakin Skywalker, as described by Obi-Wan. Luke has embarked on the path that his aunt and uncle feared, following "...*Obi-Wan on some damn fool crusade.*"¹⁷ to become a Jedi Knight like his father was.

In *The Empire Strikes Back* George Lucas provides greater exposition about Anakin Skywalker. The conversation between Darth Vader and the Emperor describes Luke as 'the son of Skywalker' and a figure to be wary of. This fear of what the heir of Skywalker could become raises the audience's estimation of Luke even higher. The natural progression of inheritance stories is of the son outstripping the father. Because of the fear Darth Vader and the Emperor hold for the potential of Luke, two of the most powerful figures in the galaxy are determined to have him turn to the Dark side or be destroyed. We learn from Obi-Wan that Luke's father was destroyed when Darth Vader fell to the Dark Side and killed him. The revelation on Cloud City of Darth Vader's identity makes the worries of Uncle Owen more important. Anakin Skywalker fell to the Dark Side destroying the Republic and helped install the Galactic Empire. This is Luke's inheritance.

¹⁶ *A New Hope*

¹⁷ *A New Hope*

The new fears that Luke has following the revelation of his father's identity also cast his time training under Yoda in a different light. When Luke enters the cave on Dagobah, he and Yoda have just finished a lecture on the difference between the Light and Dark Sides of the Force. Luke's curiosity about the differences between the Dark and the Light Side draws him to the cave. As he grabs his weapon, Yoda warns him not to take it but Luke disregards him, cinching it about his waist. While in the cave Luke has a vision of Darth Vader suddenly appearing out of the mist. Darth Vader takes up most of the screen, looming even larger than Luke who appears smaller and smaller as he backs off-screen. This allows Darth Vader to fill the viewers' vision, giving us Luke's point of view and an overwhelming sense of dread at the sight of the man who slew his father.

In a dream-like fight sequence, Luke and Darth Vader battle each other before Luke gains the upper hand and with a look of rage on his face, strikes down Darth Vader, only for the mask to fall off and reveal Luke's image behind Darth Vader's mask. This harkens back to the lesson Yoda was teaching about the differences between the Dark and Light Sides of the Force. The Jedi pull on the Force for strength, they use it for "*knowledge and defense, never attack*" and when Luke asks for clarification about the Dark Side and its relative strength, Yoda states that it isn't stronger, but it is easier, faster and more seductive. The Dark Side channels, rage, hatred, fear, and aggression giving the user a swift burst of power but ultimately the Dark Side is selfish, and its users are never fulfilled. The Dark Side is self-indulgent and pursuing it is never fulfilling, it leaves its users always needing more.

These reflections shift in meaning when the audience learns of Darth Vader's relation to Luke. The warnings become personal. The father figure that Luke has spent the last two films becoming is now a figure to be feared because the ultimate destination of that path is suffering. The Dark Side as we have been warned is a vicious, dangerous, and consuming path and those who tread it are lost. It also makes the trustworthiness of Obi-Wan and Yoda, the two figures who have been guiding Luke along his path, dubious. Obi-Wan and Yoda have both claimed that Darth Vader killed or destroyed Luke's father, keeping from him the dangerous reality that he has a very tangible connection to the figure who has been hunting him and his friends across the Galaxy.

All the build-up of both Darth Vader's menace and the legend of Luke's father is used to transition Darth Vader from antagonist to a figure to be rescued. The transformation of Luke and Darth Vader's relationship from antagonistic to familial is covered by Joseph Campbell in both the psychoanalytical but also the literary. Much like how the *Goddess* figure represents warmth and a growing of knowledge, the father figure represents the world outside the sphere of knowledge. In *A New Hope* Luke's father is described as a good friend, cunning warrior, a star pilot, and a Jedi Knight. By the end of *A New Hope*, Luke is becoming the picture of his father that Obi-Wan painted. Luke has demonstrated that he is a good friend, a cunning warrior, a fantastic pilot, and he has begun his journey to becoming a Jedi Knight. Luke's adventure has him realize his father within himself, fulfilling his aunt's belief that his destiny was always going to take him beyond Tatooine. In *The Empire Strikes Back* Luke continues to follow the path of his father, training under Yoda to become a true Jedi, and confronting the man who killed Obi-Wan and his father. The transformation of Darth Vader from pure antagonist to complicated

but pitiable figure does change how you view Luke's path, his willingness to follow his father's example, and Uncle Owen's concern about Luke having too much of his father in him. Feeling perpetually unsatisfied by Obi-Wan's version of events surrounding the fate of his father, Luke pushes for greater detail. Upon discovering the truth and feeling betrayed it was withheld from him, he demands to know why. Obi-Wan replies that once Luke's father Anakin was seduced to the Dark Side and became Darth Vader "*he ceased to be Anakin Skywalker and became Darth Vader. When that happened the good man, who was your father was destroyed.*"¹⁸ Luke's certainty that his father has good in him and can be redeemed is the defining feature of the final film in the trilogy. Luke's belief in his father and his desire to prevent his friends from being discovered on Endor is what compels Luke to turn himself over to the Imperial Forces. Permitting himself to be taken captive by the man who recently amputated his arm, and places himself on the Death Star, something the Rebel Alliance will soon attempt to destroy.

The Atonement of the Father is the step in the Hero's Journey in which the Hero must reconcile with the world outside what they have known. After having obtained the knowledge of the Special world the Hero must then use that knowledge to master the Special world, something that Luke accomplishes slowly by becoming his father in the first two films. Luke's reconciliation with the father he never knew, the father he has come to idolize, is interrupted with the revelation of Darth Vader's identity. Luke faces a series of choices. He can listen to Obi-Wan and Yoda and condemn Darth Vader for the destruction of Anakin Skywalker and seek to destroy him, or he can ignore the situation,

¹⁸ *Return of the Jedi*

find a way to never confront the problem, or he can stay strong to his conviction about the redemption of his father.

Luke's determination to reach out to Anakin Skywalker is the culmination of his training as a Jedi. This is when he begins to combine all the knowledge he has gained over the course of his journey and crystalize it into a working philosophy. Harkening back to Yoda's earlier lesson, Luke incorporates the Jedi philosophy of the Force into his actions. "*A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense, never attack.*"¹⁹ Luke's dedication to the Light Side of the Force is so complete that he disagrees with both Obi-Wan and Yoda, characters with far more experience dealing with the Dark Side of the Force, and resolves to redeem his father. This is the *Apotheosis*, the moment when the Hero's experiences crystalize and the Hero becomes more than they were before, the time when the knowledge they've gained allows them mastery of the Special world. Luke's dedication to the way of the Jedi, in the face of the danger to him and the disapproval of his mentors, shows the audience how far Luke has come from the beginning of his journey when he first refused the *Call to Adventure*.

When confronting Darth Vader for the first time since their battle on Cloud City, Luke faces him without fear and proclaims his intention to redeem him.

DV: "*The Emperor has been expecting you.*"

LS: "*I know, Father.*"

DV: "*So you have accepted the truth?*"

¹⁹ *Return of the Jedi*

LS: *"I've accepted the truth that you were once Anakin Skywalker, my father."*

DV: *"That name no longer has any meaning for me."*

LS: *"It is the name of your true self. You've only forgotten. I know there is good in you. The Emperor hasn't driven it from you fully."*

DV: *"Your skills are complete. Indeed, you are powerful, as the Emperor has foreseen. Obi-Wan once thought as you do. You don't know the power of the Dark Side. I must obey my master."*

LS: *"I will not turn, and you'll be forced to kill me."*

DV: *"If that is your destiny."*

LS: *"Search your feelings, Father. I feel the conflict within you. Let go of your hate."*

DV: *"It is too late for me, son."*

LS: *"Then my father is truly dead."²⁰*

This moment between Luke and Darth Vader on the moon of Endor encapsulates the viewpoints of father and son. Luke flips the situation of Cloud City on its head, offering his father a chance to flee, to join him on the Light Side of the Force, to divest himself of the Dark Side and the Emperor. In a reflection of Luke's own cry of denial in the face of Darth Vader's revelation at Cloud City, Darth Vader is the one to turn down Luke this

²⁰ *Return of the Jedi*

time. The line “*I must obey my master*”²¹ states that Darth Vader can’t deny his master even if he might want to.

The reconciliation between father and son is cut short when Darth Vader takes Luke to see The Emperor, who has usurped Darth Vader as both the immediate villain and the ultimate evil figure in this story. The Emperor is responsible for the destruction of Anakin Skywalker and is holding Darth Vader captive. Luke has re-entered the *Belly of the Beast*, once again to save someone from the figure in black, but this time his “*skills are complete*” and he has spent the last several years discovering himself and mastering the special world, no longer will he be a bystander. Luke is a force to be reckoned with, one feared by the enemy.

In the throne room of the Death Star, Luke, Darth Vader, and The Emperor meet face to face. The Emperor taunts Luke about several things but the most provocative is, “*by now you must know that your father can never be turned from the Dark Side. So will it be with you.*”²² The Emperor knows of Luke’s attempts to turn his father, he knows of the Rebel Alliance’s plans to attack the Death Star and has laid a trap for the friends that Luke left on Endor, including Leia who is only recently revealed to be his sister and his equal in the Force.

The Emperor twists Luke’s desires against him, taunting him with the ultimate choice: keep to his Jedi ways, his desire to redeem his father and allow his friends to die, or strike the Emperor down using his hate and fall to the Dark side. Either path would break Luke. His guilt over letting his friends die would drive him to the Dark Side as

²¹ *Return of the Jedi*

²² *Return of the Jedi*

surely as striking down his enemy with hate in his heart. Just as in the earlier films, Luke is treading a similar path to his father, he is being tempted by the same man who converted his father, his fears are being used against him, and it is successful. Luke does strike out at the Emperor, no longer able to sit by while his friends and allies are killed. At that moment Luke has fallen, his fear, anger, and hate have caused him to act, to strike out in anger, despite his adherence to the Jedi way.

Luke's battle with Darth Vader is both a literal and metaphysical struggle with the Father. As Luke fights Darth Vader up and down the throne room he's not only physically fighting, he is confronting his failures, everything that Luke is, Anakin Skywalker. Luke must overcome the final hurdle, not falling to the Dark side, before he can have truly conquered the special world. After finally overwhelming Darth Vader in combat Luke stands above him, lightsaber in hand and rage in his heart. Behind him the Emperor urges Luke to strike Darth Vader down, to take his place and complete his own fall to the Dark Side. Seeing his father's hand, a reminder to Luke's own robotic hand Luke realizes how similar he and his father are and it pulls him back from the edge. Luke renounces the Dark Side again and at the same time claims his father, both in the face of the Emperor, *"I am a Jedi. Like my father before me."*²³

George Lucas' handling of the figure of Darth Vader and his transition from antagonist to savior of the hero, his relationship, both as a metaphor and a character, are in line with many of Joseph Campbell's thoughts and theories of the father-figure in mythology. The father is a disruption to the peaceful origin world of the hero. He represents danger

²³ *Return of the Jedi*

and challenge, something for the hero to overcome. The Hero's cycle is incomplete without both the *Goddess* figure and the father figure. Leia serves as the *Goddess* in multiple roles. She is the princess, the guide and the sister, and what links Luke from the mundane world to the special. Her rescue on the Death Star is Luke's first moment of independence, her sudden and magical connection to Luke through the Force at the end of *The Empire Strikes Back* and finally, her connection as a sister is one a defining motivation for Luke to disarm and defeat Darth Vader. Darth Vader is the one who disrupts Luke's life at every turn. He captures Leia which leads to Luke's interception of her message to Obi-Wan, he kills Obi-Wan removing Luke's first mentor, he captures Leia and Han on Cloud City causing Luke to abandon his Jedi training. Finally, Darth Vader reveals the truth of his identity, shaking Luke's belief in his idealized father.

In the end, George Lucas steps away from Joseph Campbell's stance on the relationship between sons and fathers. Bill Moyers, in an interview with George Lucas, points out that Joseph Campbell believed that the proper end of the mythological father-son cycle was that of Zeus and Cronus, or Oedipus and Laius, and ended with the son slaying the father and taking his place. Bill Moyers points out that Luke has a new approach to resolving the age-old mythological pattern, *"This is where I disagree somewhat with our friend Joseph Campbell who said that the young man has to slay his father before he can become and adult himself. It seems to me, and I think you're right on here, that the young man has to identify -- has to recognize and acknowledge that he is his father and is not his father."*²⁴ This is the true end of Luke's story, he outgrows his father but instead of killing him, he spares and saves him, something acknowledged by

²⁴ Bill Moyers transcript <https://billmoyers.com/content/mythology-of-star-wars-george-lucas/>

Darth Vader, now again Anakin Skywalker, right before he dies on the Death Star.

George Lucas uses the ancient mythical trope of the son usurping the father and alters it. Luke doesn't usurp his father, he surpasses him and saves him, saving himself in the process as following the mythical pattern would require him to lose all he has learned and fought for.

Black Hat vs. White Hat

BILL MOYERS: *"The good guys were good guys; the bad guys were bad guys. You used color to suggest some of this philosophy."*

GEORGE LUCAS: *"Yeah. I use color a lot in my films. I'm very conscious of — of the design of my films."*

George Lucas' deliberate use of color feeds into everything from the designs of the planets he creates, to the colors each character wears. In his interview with Bill Moyers, he points out that his use of colors in every movie is deliberate, that how each character is dressed is important. George Lucas also states that he pulled influences from everything he's read or seen, *"What happens is that no matter how you do it, when you sit down to write something all other influences you've had in your life come into play. The things that you like, the things that you've seen, the things — the observations you've made."*²⁵ When Darth Vader enters the *Tantive IV* in *A New Hope* he is clad in black, a stark contrast to the white of the stormtroopers and the surrounding ship. Leia and Luke are dressed in white, Obi-Wan is in earth tones and blending into Tatooine, Han Solo is a mixture of black and white. In the classic costume set up of American

²⁵ *Bill Moyers transcript*

Western's, it becomes obvious what each character represents. Darth Vader in his black apparel and his intimidating, skull-like helmet, is a figure of dread and quite literally a black hat. Leia and Luke on the other hands, the purest characters, are dressed all in white, denoting their inner goodness by outwardly dressing as white hat characters.

The costume of the black hat character and the white hat character harken back to the time of black and white television, with the low quality of televisions, directors settled on a simple visual cue that stood out on the mono-colored, low-resolution screens. The bad guy was dressed in black and the good guy in white. This simple visual storytelling mechanic has endured and filtered through modern culture and it remains a staple of visual storytelling. Characters dressed in black are menacing, frightful and often evil, while white is used to signify goodness, selflessness, and purity. George Lucas' deliberate color scheme choices let his audience quickly and accurately form opinions about his characters. The bleak colors of the Death Star and the Imperial officers make it empty, the characters are indistinguishable, faceless and replaceable, a fact backed up by Darth Vader's careless disregard for his subordinate's lives. Luke and Leia are the moral centerpieces of the first film, and they remain in white and physically unscathed, letting their positive and morally upright stance be communicated throughout the films. Han Solo is a criminal with a good heart. Defined by his actions, he is entirely mercenary, never lifting a finger to help anyone unless he is motivated by the prospect of a large payoff. But in the end, his friendship with Luke inspires him to charge into battle against the massive, deadly and merciless forces of the Galactic Empire. The costume of Obi-Wan befits a man in exile, he is blending into the world around him, the

browns and tans of his robes match with the landscape of Tatooine while the style of his clothing makes him stand out from all others around him, the robe evoking a much older style when compared to Han's vest and pants combo, appropriate for a hermit figure of an ancient mystical order.

When Luke finally decides to join up with the Rebel alliance, we see him don the orange flight suit worn by the other pilots, something that stays with him until he journey's to Dagobah and begins his Jedi training in earnest.

George Lucas uses the wardrobe of his characters as a silent sign of their allegiance. Leia's clothing remains remarkably static wearing her white dress for most of *A New Hope*, her outfit as a general for *The Empire Strikes Back*, and her final camouflage outfit in *Return of the Jedi* each reflect her character growth as she moves from a passive figure to an active character.

Luke's outfits match his allegiances and priorities. He begins the saga as a blank slate before joining up with the Rebel Alliance and donning the orange flight suit. Luke's Jedi training is marked by wearing tan and simple clothing reminiscent of Obi-Wan's own, and his final attire is a fully black outfit more closely resembling the Emperor or Darth Vader.

George Lucas uses the shift in clothing to showcase different facets of each character's personality. Leia's original attire gives her a serene and confident manner, she is immaculate even during her captivity. Her more rugged general attire shows that she is not above the difficulties of her troops and while her slave bikini is iconic of the damsel

in distress, it isn't her choice to wear. The clothing to take note of is instead her camo gear, displaying her determination to fight for her cause alongside her friends.

Luke's changes in clothing indicate his internal loyalties and morality. In the beginning, he is dressed in white, aligning him with Leia and diametrically opposed to Darth Vader. His loyalties shift from Leia alone, to the Rebellion as a group after he joins up, appearing in the flight suit at the end of *A New Hope* and the beginning of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Once he begins his Jedi training, he is dressed in the tan colors worn by Yoda and Obi-Wan and when he decides to abandon his training to rescue his friends, he is again dressed in his Rebel flight suit. What is most important is how his outfit changes in *Return of the Jedi*. Luke dresses entirely in black, no longer wearing his rebel clothing or that of the Jedi. Instead, he most closely resembles Darth Vader and the Emperor, visually linking himself to the Dark Side and his father.

Luke's shift in visual aesthetic accompanies his disagreement with his mentors. Both Yoda and Obi-Wan are adamant in their belief in the irredeemable nature of Darth Vader. Luke's shift from the robes and colors of the Jedi to the strong black apparel are visual cues that differentiate his convictions from his mentors.

The most iconic prop of Star Wars is arguably the lightsaber. It is the tool of the Jedi and weapon of the Sith, an archaic weapon more suited for precision and not "*clumsy or random as a blaster*."²⁶ While there is a great deal of speculation about meanings behind the color of the lightsaber blades and a good deal of supported lore, none of that will be touched upon, mostly due to the nebulous state of its status as official lore of the

²⁶ *A New Hope*

Star Wars literary universe and the fact that much of the speculation occurred after the release of all three original films.

One concept that can be supported and discussed is the change in Luke's lightsaber color from blue to green in between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. Luke's lightsaber is an artifact of his father, something passed down to him by Obi-Wan, and it carries him through to his confrontation with Darth Vader on Cloud City. The transcript of a conversation between Lawrence Kasdan, Richard Marquand and George Lucas can be found in J.W. Rinzler's book *The Making of Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*. This conversation between Lucas, Marquand, and Kasdan addresses Luke's new lightsaber, its origin, and the meaning behind it.

Lucas: *"Yes, it could be totally different looking. We can work that out. But the idea running throughout the whole trilogy is: First he's given his father's sword, because his father lost it in the fight with Ben Kenobi: Ben cut his hand off and Vader fell into the volcano, so Ben then pried the laser sword out of the hand and kept it for the son. So, then what the father did was cut his son's hand and laser sword off — and that was a way of severing the relationship between father and son. Not only did Luke lose his weapon and was castrated, but at the same time, his father split that relationship. Luke was carrying his sword for his father. Now he is not doing that anymore. In this one, he's built his own. He has built his own laser sword; he is his own man; he is not a son anymore. He is an equal."*²⁷

²⁷ *The Making of Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* J.W. Rinzler

Luke's change in costume clues the audience into his changed nature. Luke is somber and reserved, much like his clothing. He approaches Jabba offering a peaceful solution, despite seeing Leia trapped and humiliated in front of him, this is markedly different behavior from the previous two films. Luke's first instinct when it has come to his friends in danger has been to blow through whatever is endangering them with as much force as possible. We see Luke the conciliator, he's grown from the young boy he was, the son wielding the weapon of his father, into a man who has forged his own path.

The final stage for Luke in his trials and *Return of the Jedi* places him in the hands of the enemy, the throne of the Death Star. Next to the Emperor and Darth Vader Luke appears to fit perfectly, dressed much like them he isn't visually opposed, like he has been the other times he's fought Darth Vader. Luke's sudden desire to be a negotiator appears multiple times in this film, first with Jabba, entreating him in his palace and before the Sarlacc pit, with Darth Vader on the surface of Endor and finally when confronting the Emperor Luke doesn't immediately spring to action, instead attempting to reason with his enemies.

George Lucas uses the change of Luke's appearance to showcase how Luke is changing in as his story grows, his final costume paints him not as an antagonist or moral opposite to Darth Vader and the Emperor but an equal. The Emperor fears what Luke has the potential to become and this status as an equal is reflected in Luke's wardrobe.

By setting up Luke as the visual opposite of Darth Vader in the first film, George Lucas is able to create a drastic change in the audience's relationship to Luke by dressing him

in clothing similar to Darth Vader, the colors giving us a visual clue to the changes in Luke's character and manners before he even opens his mouth.

Spirituality and the Unifying Force

GEORGE LUCAS: *"I put the Force into the movies in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people. More a belief in God than a belief in any particular, you know, religious system."*²⁸

George Lucas' desire to instill his films with a sense of spirituality is a recognized success. People of many religions have compared the Force to their own religious order, showing how the Force represents a duality that many faiths struggle with. The Force is benevolent and malevolent, it guides, and it dominates.

The theology of the Jedi and Sith on display in the original trilogy is limited and has had a great deal expanded upon in subsequent films, books, interviews, games, and TV shows. What is available about the theology in the films comes mostly from off-hand comments. Both Han Solo and Imperial Officer Motti refer to the Jedi as an ancient and disbanded religion, their casual disregard for the powers of the Force make the Jedi seem as fallen from grace.

What can be discussed is how George Lucas sets up the spiritual aspects of the Jedi. The Force is divided into two parts, the Dark Side and the Light Side. The Jedi are steeped in the Light Side, their order is made up of Knights, men and women sworn to

²⁸ *Bill Moyers Interview*

the defense of liberty and democracy. Those who follow the path of the Dark Side are known as the Sith, the two in Star Wars are Darth Vader and Emperor Palpatine. Both men are vicious and self-serving. George Lucas states that his desire was to bring to the fore the question of God, to disregard religious systems and focus on the essence of the Divine. For this effort to succeed, he first must build a religious system to cast aside. In this, the Force serves as a stand-in for contemporary religion. The Force exists, something the audience accepts as truth due to the assertions of both Obi-Wan and Darth Vader until we see it in action. As the storyline progresses throughout the films, the division between the Dark and Light Sides of the Force become more apparent. Darth Vader is a constant threat, employing violence and murder to further his aims while the Jedi are serene, having been defeated and destroyed by Darth Vader. Despite the Jedi detachment, Luke looks to them for training. His desire to emulate his father and gain the knowledge of the Force, knowledge held only by the Jedi and the Sith, drives him to walk the path of the Jedi.

However, as the films progress the Jedi's defeat appears to have had a lasting effect. The Jedi are worried about Luke and his emotions. Fearing his attachment to his friends will lead to his destruction, both Yoda and Obi-Wan counsel Luke to not fly to his friends' defense on Cloud City. This is what sows the seeds of doubt. Surely an order of Knights would seek to defend those they love, those in peril, to fight evil and darkness at every turn.

The deception of Obi-Wan and Yoda about Darth Vader's identity further weakens the image of the Jedi. Both of Luke's mentors lied to him. They hid from him the truth about his father while excusing their deception with a sophist argument that "*from a certain*

point of view”²⁹ they didn’t lie. George Lucas’ purpose to instill a belief in faith and spirituality instead of religious institutions means that Luke, as the character who is principally involved with the religious hierarchy, needs to question and doubt the status quo while maintaining a faith in the larger system of belief.

Both the Jedi and the Sith speak in terms of absolutes. Yoda warns Luke that the Dark Side will “*forever dominate your destiny*” when instructing him on the difference between the Dark Side and Light Side, a viewpoint that remains consistent throughout the films. Even when Luke professes his desire to redeem his father, Yoda and Obi-Wan discourage him from attempting to do so. Their rhetoric is deterministic, stating that Darth Vader destroyed Anakin Skywalker, that he is lost forever, and that if Luke confronts his father he too will be destroyed. This language of determinism is found also in the Sith. Both Darth Vader and Emperor Palpatine taunt Luke with the irredeemable nature of Darth Vader, Vader stating that he couldn’t rebel against his master, that it is “*too late*” for him. The Emperor taunts Luke with Darth Vader’s refusal to change and backs Luke into a moral corner, Luke can watch his friends die while sticking to the pacifism of the Jedi but damning them to death via inaction or he can kill the Emperor and complete his own fall to the Dark Side.

In the end, Luke and Lucas reject the rhetoric of both the Jedi and the Sith. The absolutism preached by both factions is proved false. Luke disregards the advice of his teachers and reveals the truth of Darth Vader’s identity to Leia despite it putting her in danger. When fighting Darth Vader Luke gives into his aggressive instincts and briefly

²⁹ *Return of the Jedi*

falls to the Dark side, before he re-centers himself and denies the Emperor. Luke's denial of the Emperor in the final moments of *The Return of the Jedi* coupled with the redemption of Darth Vader via Luke's pleas show that the fatalism of both the Jedi and Sith are false.

George Lucas' stance on the importance of faith in the figure of God, Divinity or something similar instead of adherence to a religious organization shines through. Luke's journey with the Jedi and Sith show that both ancient orders have a deep mechanical understanding of the Force. However, Luke's experiences prove that their philosophical tenets are flawed. The strength of one's character is what influences the side of the Force you draw on. Luke can use his rage and fear to defeat Darth Vader, someone who has dominated every fight he has had with Luke while maintaining the self-control to not surrender to his darker instincts.

The Force works in balance, Luke's final mission is to return his father to the Light Side of the Force because he has been lost in the aggression, fear, and selfishness of the Dark Side. Lucas' philosophy does have a dichotomy, there is a clear differentiation between what is good and what is evil, but he refutes the idea of damnation. No figure is irredeemable unless they choose to be. Luke's physical victory is the destruction of the Death Star and the death of the Emperor, and his moral and spiritual victory is returning his father to the Light Side of the Force, something both Yoda and Obi-Wan denied was possible.

Chivalric Romance

George Lucas uses the imagery of knighthood and the values of chivalry to craft the Jedi Order, and their evil counterforce the Sith. He does so because the tenets of knighthood and chivalry are ingrained into our social values and well understood. By using a framework with which his audience is universally familiar, George Lucas can easily set up the story structure and trials his characters face in ways the audience can swiftly grasp. George Lucas then uses the familiarity of knightly virtue to turn expectations on their head. Luke's journey is messy and incomplete, while he ends the films with a semblance of serenity, he is far from being a bastion of knighthood.

In 1977 there were no knights wandering the country, fighting brigands, rescuing princesses or enforcing law and order. But still, the imagery of knighthood lived on in films, TV shows, and books. Knights were figures of justice, protecting the weak, fighting evil, and rescuing the helpless. Despite the absence of Knights, the romanticized ideal of the chivalrous hero still tugs at the heartstrings of modern society. Chivalry is used to divide heroes from villains. Superman is honest, brave, and self-sacrificing while Lex Luthor is duplicitous, self-serving, and arrogant. The simple contrast between the values of chivalry and the lack of them lends itself to easy storytelling giving an author a tool to show the reader who is to be trusted and who is to be doubted. This cultural understanding allows George Lucas to set up the concept of Jedi Knights in Star Wars and easily paint them as the good guys, while establishing the Sith as fallen knights, people of evil character and intent.

In Star Wars the special relationship with a class or caste of warriors and chivalry returns. The Force acts as a metaphysical judge between those who are chivalrous and those who are not. In the prelude to the final fight between Luke Skywalker and

Emperor Palpatine, they exchange barbs with each other with Luke exclaiming “*Your overconfidence is your weakness*”³⁰ and the Emperor riposting with “*Your faith in your friends is yours*”³¹. This exchange shows the major conflict between the two. Luke’s confidence springs from the bonds he has forged with others while Palpatine relies solely on himself and his own power. George Lucas has stated that the Dark and the Light side of the Force represent conflicting but ever-present forces within oneself. The struggle to act selflessly and the lure of selfish desires. This internal struggle is what Luke Skywalker faces and eventually overcomes in the original trilogy. This struggle epitomizes the challenges of chivalry; to have power and to use it responsibly. Lucas uses the ideal of noblesse oblige and equips his heroes and villains with magic powers, capable of forcing others to their will through persuasion or coercion and uses their methods to show if they are good or evil.

Beyond the special relationship that Luke has with the Force, which puts him a special class with power much like social, political and martial power wielded by literary and literal knights of earlier eras, we see that other character’s struggle with the same conflict between selflessness and selfishness. Han Solo is a criminal, not at all entitled to the special powers of the Jedi and Sith -- he is in fact introduced in the Mos Eisley Cantina which is known as a “*hive of scum and villainy*”³² -- but across the films he changes from a smuggler in the employ of a slaving crime lord to a rebel general who is ready to give up his chance with Leia, the woman he loves, to allow her to be with whomever she desires most. Obi-Wan Kenobi, Leia, Han Solo, and faithful R2-D2 -- all

³⁰ *Return of the Jedi*

³¹ *Return of the Jedi*

³² *A New Hope*

these characters -- display a more universal understanding of chivalry and righteousness that is found in classic chivalry novels. While there is a special class to whom chivalry has greater consequences, the Jedi, it still is a social norm, not a system for a special caste.

The universalism of chivalry in Star Wars reflects the real world. Over time the title of knight has disappeared and is only used now as a token of esteem for those who have accomplished grand deeds. While several people are knighted for valor in combat the most famous are often knighted for their work in charity or their contributions to the arts. In this way, George Lucas uses chivalry in Star Wars as a literary device. By playing on the stereotypes of knighthood he creates sympathy for the characters of Luke, Leia, and Han. Obi-Wan Kenobi introduces us to Jedi, commenting that the lightsaber he gives to Luke is By playing on the understood tropes of knighthood, idealism, charity, sacrifice, and righteousness George Lucas can, with a short scene, inform us why Obi-Wan is trustworthy, why his wisdom has merit, and that he is an honorable character. Lucas uses the audience's cultural knowledge and love of knighthood to establish a great depth of inferred character in a short period of time.

As the films progress, Lucas expands upon the presumptions of the audience. The revelation of Luke's true parentage and Obi-Wan's deception on these matters is shocking to film followers. Obi-Wan served as a paragon, he represented the best of an ancient legacy, wisdom, power, and sacrifice. When the Force ghost of Obi-Wan share the truth about Luke's father "*from a certain point of view*"³³ it sounds hollow to both

³³ *Return of the Jedi*

Luke and the audience. George Lucas used the general understanding of knightly behavior including honesty and, in this exchange, introduces complexity to a simple ideal. Obi-Wan hid from Luke the truth of Darth Vader's identity and Luke's heritage not with the intent to deceive, but rather to protect. But in so doing, lied to those he had sworn to teach. This rising complexity is woven throughout the original *Star Wars* trilogy. Luke transforms throughout each film and throughout the entire saga. He transitions from a lost young man to a dedicated rebel, then from an impetuous Padawan to a patient warrior, and finally a true Jedi who redeems his father. The situations that Luke is placed in grow increasingly complex. Luke's actions are foolish and idealistic he begins the series, filled with self-doubt, but with each trial Luke grows and ends the saga finding peace within himself despite his possible death.

The opening of *A New Hope* sets up the simple differences between Luke and Darth Vader, the most readily apparent being Darth Vader dressed head to toe in black and Luke fully clad in white. Luke begins as an earnest and unfulfilled young man eager to leave the farm and find a life outside of Tatooine which is a stark contrast to Darth Vader who leads an assault on a diplomatic vessel and captures and tortures a princess. There is no room for nuance or interpretation. Vader is painted clearly as an evil figure. The reason behind this simplicity is that as the *Star Wars* saga continues, we see and understand the motivations behind Vader's evil nature and Luke's unceasing belief in his father's redemption. Lucas deliberately uses the *Star Wars* saga to teach moral lessons.

The use of chivalry in Star Wars as a storytelling device, as opposed to a character trait, demonstrates how chivalry is a tool to delineate moral alignment instead of personal worthiness. Obi-Wan lies to Luke, Yoda deceives him when they first meet, and in *The Return of the Jedi* both Obi-Wan and Yoda discourage Luke from facing Vader, seeing him as too lost to the Dark Side to be redeemed. Luke's struggle with his identity is present in each movie, as he moves from farm boy to Rebel Commander to Padawan and finally Jedi Knight, he struggles with the pressures of each station. The invitation by Obi-Wan to travel to far off Alderaan and save a princess is all he's wanted but he immediately denies himself the opportunity. His desire to become a Jedi Knight, to prove himself worthy of Obi-Wan's legacy becomes a roadblock in his training. Luke's frustrations, when he allows them to dictate his actions, lead to his own destruction. His anger and hatred of what he sees in himself blind him to the danger of Vader and the final revelation of his true parentage initiates his suffering. Luke's desperate denial of his ancestry shows the depths of his anguish. Lucas uses this moment to punch both Luke and the audience in the stomach. Luke's heroic narrative is put in jeopardy by this.

Luke's ancestry is a topic throughout the films. Lucas uses Luke's parentage for a twofold effect. It makes Luke's fears about falling to the Dark Side more real and it transforms Vader into a sympathetic character, making Luke's desire to redeem Vader understandable to the audience. Lucas used Luke's admiration of his father, a knight who was supposed to be Obi-Wan's equal, to twist the revelation of his heritage into a painful moment for both Luke and the audience and ties Luke's desire to be a Jedi to his search for identity. He admires Obi-Wan and Yoda, seeks their wisdom and relies upon their guidance, believing that his father was a similar man. The discovery that his father

is not only alive but serves as the right-hand man of the Emperor fills Luke with the need to redeem Vader rather than defeat him.

Return of the Jedi heralds the resurgence of the Jedi Order and with it the chivalry of a different time. Throughout the film, Luke displays various tenets of chivalry which include his offer to negotiate with Jabba the Hutt till the moment of his execution, him charging after Leia to save her, and separating himself from his friends and their mission when he realizes his presence endangers them. Luke also struggles with his instincts. His desire to save Vader drives him but also places him in the hands of the Emperor. *Return of the Jedi* focuses on Luke's struggle to live the Jedi Code and the danger of his own fall. When Luke enters Jabba's Palace, he does so with the intention of bartering for his friends' lives. Despite his peaceful intentions, a very important moment happens on screen right before he meets with Jabba. Having gotten into the Palace, Luke is confronted with Gamorrean guards and he moves them using the deeply cruel force choke made famous by Vader. It symbolizes extreme power and utter callousness. This is a quick moment, barely on screen but it reveals, along with his changed costume, that Luke indeed struggles to stay on the Light Side.

As *Return of the Jedi* continues, Luke's struggle with the Dark Side becomes more apparent. He disagrees with both Yoda and Obi-Wan, refuses to condemn Vader, and remains adamant in his desire to redeem him. He dresses in all black in this film, a visual difference from his first on-screen appearance, and most importantly he briefly falls to the Dark Side in his climactic confrontation with Vader. His time on the Death Star and in the presence of the Emperor sees his friends placed in danger causing him to fear for them. Luke does eventually succumb to the Emperor's goading, striking out in

anger at both him and Vader. Vader uses Luke's newly revealed sister against him, and Luke finally fulfills the Emperor's wishes, using his hate, anger, and fear to batter Vader to the ground. When poised over him, after having cut off his father's robotic hand, Luke realizes that the prophecy revealed in the cave scene in *Empire Strikes Back* has come true. He and Vader are the same. Right before he can deliver the final blow Luke tosses his weapon aside, his subsequent suffering and pleas reach Vader, who destroys the Emperor before shedding the mask of Vader, dying as Anakin Skywalker, a Jedi not a Sith.

The reason Luke falls is that Lucas wasn't interested in telling a story that has good defeating evil. The focus of the original trilogy, the final message is that of balance. Luke's failures made him stronger, he learned more about himself and his opponents because he kept following his emotions. His instincts about Vader proved to be correct, he could be saved. The final scene of *Return of the Jedi* reinforces this idea, Anakin having turned from the Dark Side in his final moments becomes one with the force, something that had confounded him when Obi-Wan did it. Lucas used the trappings of chivalry to make identifying characters easy. Luke is clearly a knight-in-training destined for greatness and Vader is the big bad monster. By the end of the trilogy Luke is a noble hero but not a pure one. He reacts out of anger, he is fearful of his own power, and he succumbs to hate. Vader becomes a tragic figure who was tricked into falling. The purpose of Luke and Vader's story was balance and redemption, not violence and victory. Chivalry was a commencing tool, one that's usefulness was outgrown when Vader became a sympathetic character. As the main antagonist, a role different from the ultimate antagonist of the story, he was no longer someone to be defeated but

someone to be saved. Luke is a flawed man, not a perfect paragon and the flawed hero fits perfectly into Lucas' fairytale of balance and introspection.

Conclusion

George Lucas' use of the monomyth structure is a heavy influence throughout the *Star Wars* trilogy. Each film follows an individual hero's journey and the overall trilogy has its own intertwined journey. The structure of Joseph Campbell's literary theory allowed Lucas to create a familiar feeling story; one that used frameworks, knights, rebellions, and empires, that allowed his audience to easily grasp his intent. Once the audience felt comfortable in the style of his storytelling Lucas was able to twist the recognizable tropes to craft a revitalization of ancient stories.

In his interview with Bill Moyers, George Lucas states that he intentionally used the Hero's Journey to retell ancient mythology and ancient moral stories for a new generation. The Science-Fiction packaging of *Star Wars*, the deliberate mixture of futuristic setting coupled with the opening crawl that sets the saga in the past "*A long time ago in a galaxy far far away*" deliberately invokes the future and the past in the same story. Lucas' concern with recreating didactic stories and his personal interpretation of the heroic cycle is apparent in each film. The most striking difference between Joseph Campbell and George Lucas' take on the heroic cycle appears in the father-figure. Joseph Campbell felt that the father-figure embodied the dangers of the new world the hero finds themselves in, a theory he backs up with references to the story of Zeus and Cronos and twin Navajo war gods who must steal rain from their

father. Lucas shifts this narrative to a more modern system that sees the father as something the child must acknowledge within themselves, the triumphs and the failures, and then move beyond creating a new standard for a new generation.

By using and altering an established literary system Lucas negates the need to create his own mythological rhythm. He borrows from all over the world, not only taking from ancient mythology and religions but also from modern film and TV tropes.

By creating expectations for his audience “Darth Vader is in all black and killed old Obi-Wan so he MUST be evil” or “Luke is the main hero so he’s going to get the girl” George Lucas is then able to subvert these expectations and generate new meaning with his films. By subverting the audience expectations George Lucas began to create his own tropes, his own myths and legends

Lucas’ success is overwhelming and far-reaching. The cultural impact of Star Wars is not easily calculated but Star Wars has been a constant media presence since the release of *A New Hope* in 1977 and every film has been a multi-million-dollar, global success, and phenomenon. The controversy surrounding the new films, which while not being Lucas’ personal creations, exist within his universe, demonstrate exactly how possessive modern culture is of the *Star Wars* brand. George Lucas ultimately achieved his goal. His story is a modern cultural epic and moralistic story. his story is the modern cultural epic, Star Wars is a moralistic story. The body of the Hero’s Journey as envisioned by Joseph Campbell remains largely untouched. By restructuring and re-ordering of some steps and adapting the underpinning psychological tenets, George Lucas fashioned a Hero’s Journey that expressed his views on the trials of the modern

age. He crafted a myth that dealt with Imperialism, racism, feminine empowerment, child-parent relationships, and many more issue besides. He created one of the most impactful and resonating stories of modern time, his work has spawned a universe, a theology in which fans fight battles over what interpretation of events in the films, books, comics, TV shows, and various other media, mean. Lucas set out to create a story that would have people questioning their moral and cultural assumptions, adapting his own ideas and incorporating them into their lives and he succeeded. Star Wars is iconic, beloved and one of the most recognized brands in the modern world. Lucas' space farm boy has gone on to inspire generations to believe in the magic of adventure, to struggle with their own personal challenges and disadvantages, and find the inner strength to confront their own villains. The heroic cycle is rejuvenated and consumed by entirely new generations.

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Biography

William Connor Graham Butler was born in Atlanta, Georgia in 1994. After turning 10 his family moved to New Zealand, where he lived for another 4, becoming a citizen in the process. Connor moved to Austin, Texas in 2008 where he attended high school. After graduating in 2012, Connor spent a year volunteering in San Antonio with City Year, a program designed to keep children in school. In 2013 Connor entered UT as a Plan ii student and while there focused his studies on history and literature.